

# Seat Belt Campaign for Federal Employees

JULIAN A. WALLER, M.D., M.P.H., and JOSEPH CONTE, B.A.

**D**ESPITE many studies showing the value of seat belts as a potential means of reducing the 40,000 roadway deaths and 1,500,000 injuries in the nation annually, less than 4 percent of automobiles in the United States are equipped with this lifesaving device.

In Atlanta, Ga., the avoidance of serious injury by two Federal Government employees who were wearing seat belts in a severe three-car accident provided the impetus for a local campaign by the Public Health Service to promote the use of seat belts by employees of the Federal Government. Seat belts were offered for sale through the Public Health Service at approximately half price by arrangement with the manufacturers, and two service stations offered to install them at a reduced price. Eight of 12 service stations and automobile dealers in the immediate vicinity would not install belts because of lack of experience.

The 1-month seat belt campaign was conducted in November 1960 for approximately 600 Federal employees: 289 employees in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) and approximately 70 employees of the U.S. Navy, U.S. Department of Agricul-

ture and other Federal departments in Atlanta, and an estimated 240 Bureau of Old Age and Survivors Insurance (BOASI) employees in field offices in the six southeastern States comprising HEW Region IV.

The groups studied differ from the general population in that all are employees of the Federal Government. Almost none are in either the highest or the lowest socioeconomic levels. However, the percentage who owned seat belts before the campaign approximated the percentage of seat belt owners in the general working population, despite the fact that most persons contacted were employed by an agency of the Federal Government which stresses health and safety in general and the use of seat belts in particular. Therefore, the conclusions relating to this group should also be applicable to the general working population.

The program was originally directed to the 83 Public Health Service employees in the regional office. These employees were exposed to intensive personal sales contact by the Public Health Service staff, letters, a movie entitled "Safety Through Seat Belts," and a "Crashmobile" exhibit. This exhibit consists of toy cars, each containing two passengers, one wearing a rubber band "seat belt." On impact the unbelted passenger is ejected from the car while the belted passenger remains in his seat.

The campaign was subsequently extended to include 127 HEW employees in the same building as the Public Health Service employees. This group was exposed to limited personal contact, letters, the movie, and the exhibit. An additional 79 HEW employees in the Food and Drug Administration housed in an adjacent smaller building received letters, and a few saw the movie. The 240 BOASI employees outside

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*Dr. Waller is coordinator of accident prevention, California Department of Public Health, on assignment from the Division of Accident Prevention, Public Health Service. He was formerly consultant in chronic diseases, Region IV, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Atlanta, Ga. Mr. Conte is public health representative in research development, Public Health Service, Region IV, Atlanta, Ga. This seat belt campaign was directed by the regional office of the Division of Special Health Services, Public Health Service. The accident prevention activities of this division have since been assigned to the Division of Accident Prevention.*

Atlanta were informed by letter of the importance of using seat belts and of their availability at reduced prices through the Public Health Service. The 70 employees in other departments of the Federal Government had access to the Crashmobile exhibit.

Because of the various approaches to different groups, it was possible to correlate the success of the campaign with the intensity and type of approach employed.

During the first 3 weeks of the campaign a different letter, enclosing an order blank for seat belts, was mailed each week to all Federal employees in the study. These letters corrected misconceptions about seat belts and reviewed the recent employee accident. The movie was shown during the second week and was attended by 80 persons. During peak pedestrian hours of the third week the Crashmobile exhibit was shown in the lobby of the building housing Public Health Service and other HEW employees. Order blanks and models of seat belts were also on display. The 70 employees from other Federal agencies in Atlanta saw the exhibit and discussed seat belts with the exhibitors. During the fourth week an article on seat belts appeared in one of Atlanta's two major newspapers.

At the end of November 231 seat belts had been bought by 99 purchasers, 54 of whom lived in Atlanta. Thirty-four percent of the Public Health Service employees, the group exposed to the most intensive sales contacts, purchased belts. Progressively less personal contact and less evidence of management interest resulted in progressively fewer sales among the other groups approached.

As a byproduct of the campaign, several Fed-

**Table 1. Precampaign attitude of 51 current purchasers of seat belts, Atlanta, Ga., November 1960**

Attitude	Number	Percent
Had not heard about seat belts.....	1	2.0
No interest.....	3	5.9
Somewhat interested.....	16	31.4
High degree of interest.....	30	58.7
Already own seat belts.....	1	2.0
Total.....	51	100.0

**Table 2. Reasons 51 current purchasers had not bought seat belts previously, Atlanta, Ga., November 1960**

Reason	Number	Percent
No previous interest or thought about seat belts.....	4	7.9
Not convinced as to value.....	8	15.7
Belts useful but too much bother.....	1	2.0
Cost of belts and installation excessive.....	17	33.2
Didn't know where to purchase or how to install.....	13	25.5
Convinced of value but procrastinated in purchase.....	14	27.4
No car.....	1	2.0
Previously had belts—repurchasing.....	3	5.9
Other.....	2	3.9
Total.....	<sup>1</sup> 63	<sup>1</sup> 123.5

<sup>1</sup> 12 purchasers gave multiple answers.

eral agencies housed in another office building and the Georgia Department of Public Health started similar campaigns.

### Evaluation

The immediate success of a seat belt campaign can be measured by the number of seat belts purchased. However, this may not represent a true index of the long-range effect of the campaign. At the start of an educational program individual interest may run the entire gamut, from persons who are on the verge of purchasing belts to those who feel that seat belts are a hazard to safe driving. In addition to counting the number of belts sold, evaluation of results should attempt to assess any change of attitude toward seat belts among persons exposed to the educational program.

For this reason, 2 months after completion of the campaign, different but comparable questionnaires were sent to the 54 seat belt purchasers and the 170 nonpurchasers who lived in Atlanta, all of whom could be easily reached by interoffice memorandum. After a single reminder questionnaires were returned by 51 purchasers (94 percent) and 157 nonpurchasers (92 percent). Of the nonpurchasers, 116 (74 percent) owned cars without seat belts; 26 (17 percent) did not own an automobile; 10 respondents (6 percent) owned automobiles equipped with seat belts, including 2 who had two cars,

with belts in only one car; and 5 (3 percent) returned their questionnaires with so few answers that they were considered unsuitable for analysis.

Among the purchaser respondents 47 (92 percent) indicated previous interest in seat belts (table 1). Excessive cost, procrastination, and lack of knowledge of where to purchase belts or how to install them were the major reasons given for delaying purchase (33, 27, and 26 percent respectively) although eight persons (16 percent) had some reservations about the value of seat belts in an accident (table 2).

Eight persuasive or educational media influenced the results of the campaign: the effect of previous information about seat belts, the movie, letters and literature distributed during the campaign, endorsement of belts by medical and safety groups, the Crashmobile exhibit, the recent employee accident, reduced prices of belts, and discussion with fellow employees. Purchaser respondents most frequently listed previous knowledge of seat belts, reduced prices, and endorsement by medical and safety groups (81, 79, and 62 percent respectively) as motivating them to purchase belts, while non-purchasers indicated that previous knowledge of seat belts and endorsement by medical and safety groups were the most persuasive factors. No one medium was felt to be the most useful by even 50 percent of the nonpurchaser respondents.

**Table 3. Current attitude toward seat belts, 116 nonpurchaser respondents who own cars but do not own seat belts, Atlanta, Ga., November 1960**

Attitude	Number	Percent
Might increase danger in an accident.....	3	2.6
Of limited or no usefulness.....	42	36.2
Too expensive or installation too difficult.....	19	16.4
Too much trouble to use.....	12	10.3
Convinced of usefulness.....	33	28.5
Ready to buy, can't convince husband.....	5	4.3
Other.....	6	5.1
Total.....	<sup>1</sup> 120	<sup>1</sup> 103.4

<sup>1</sup> 13 respondents did not answer; 17 gave multiple answers.

**Table 4. Effect of campaign on attitude toward seat belt usage, 116 nonpurchaser respondents who own cars but do not own seat belts, Atlanta, Ga., November 1960**

Attitude	Number	Percent
No change:		
No previous or subsequent interest.....	28	24.1
Some previous interest.....	59	51.0
Interest increased.....	22	19.0
Other.....	3	2.5
No answer.....	4	3.4
Total.....	116	100.0

Thirty-eight (33 percent) of the 116 nonpurchaser respondents who own cars without seat belts felt that belts are useful but were not ready to purchase them. Of these, five were women who could not convince their husbands of the value of belts. Nineteen (16 percent) of these respondents expressed concern over the excessive cost or the difficulty of installation of belts, while 45 (39 percent) felt that seat belts are dangerous or of unproved usefulness (table 3).

What did the program do to change attitudes about the effectiveness of seat belts? The effects of the campaign on the 116 nonpurchaser respondents are shown in table 4. Twenty-eight (24 percent) expressed no interest in belts prior to or following the campaign, the interest of 59 respondents (51 percent) was unchanged, and some change was effected in the attitude of the remaining 22 nonpurchasers (19 percent). Answers to the question about the effect of the campaign were not given in four questionnaires (3 percent) and were not classified in three (2 percent).

Two months after completion of the campaign 88 percent of the seat belt purchasers had installed their belts and 59 percent were using them for both city and highway driving. Several persons had difficulty in installing the belts, and one person was completely unsuccessful.

#### Discussion

It is apparent from analysis of the questionnaires that very few persons purchase seat belts

because they are suddenly convinced of their value. The vast majority of purchasers become interested in belts at some time prior to purchasing them and convert interest into action when purchase and installation of belts are made sufficiently convenient. At the time of the campaign reduction in cost represented a major factor in the purchase of seat belts. Likewise, with the apparently widespread lack of knowledge of automobile service personnel about installation of seat belts, it is indeed fortunate that seat belt fittings are being placed in most new automobiles.

For the nonpurchaser the seat belt campaign serves as one of many educational and motivational building blocks until the definitive step is finally taken. As a result of the Atlanta campaign 19 percent of the nonpurchaser respondents indicated a significant change in attitude in favor of using seat belts. A number subsequently inquired about belts, and a limited 2-day repeat offer through the Public Health Service resulted in the purchase of 29 additional belts by 12 persons who had indicated some interest in seat belts on the questionnaires. Several other persons purchased belts from retail stores in Atlanta.

The importance of direct personal approach compared with mass communication techniques cannot be overemphasized. The active interest of employers is likewise important. Where both personal approach and employer interest were present, a greater number of seat belts were sold.

In retrospect, it is felt that the campaign was too short to achieve maximum effect. The delayed interest which appeared after 1 or 2 months led us to feel that ideally the program should have run for 2 or 3 months, or for 1 month followed by a second month-long campaign after 3 to 6 months. In addition, the campaign reached its peak and ended just prior to the arrival of monthly paychecks, when

many employees had depleted their financial resources. If the campaign had included the next payday several additional purchases of seat belts might have been made. The recent employee accident appeared to have no effect upon prospective purchasers.

### Summary

As a result of a Public Health Service seat belt campaign for Federal employees in Atlanta, Ga., in November 1960, 99 of 600 persons contacted purchased seat belts.

Previous knowledge about seat belts strongly influenced 92 percent of seat belt purchasers who responded to a questionnaire.

The major reasons for delay in purchasing belts were procrastination, excessive cost, and lack of knowledge about sources of belts and methods of installing them.

Personal contact, availability of seat belts at reduced prices, and convenience of installation appeared to be important factors in the decision to purchase belts at the time of the campaign. Most of the service stations contacted were unwilling to install belts because of lack of experience.

Nineteen percent of nonpurchaser respondents were favorably influenced by the seat belt promotion. Twenty-four percent had no interest in belts before or after the campaign, while 51 percent had been interested but showed no increase in interest as a result of the sales and education program. However, after a lapse of time a number of persons made further inquiry about the continued availability of seat belts, and some additional purchases were made.

Properly run and correctly timed seat belt campaigns can serve a useful function in the slow process of safety education. The decision to purchase and use seat belts is usually the result of repeated educational attempts over a long period of time rather than of a sudden awareness of the value of belts.